



Lakeside Middle School

Ft. Wayne, Indiana

PROFILE

School District: Fort Wayne Community

School District

District Enrollment: 30,980

School Enrollment: 531

Grades: 6-8

Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 86%

Special Education: 18%

Ethnicity:

- 48% White
- 28% African American
- 13% Two or more races
- 8% Hispanic
- 3% Asian/Pacific Islander

“I never thought I was smart.”

That’s what one student told teacher Diane Phillips after the student finally started having success in math using ALEKS.

Phillips loves hearing that kind of reaction because she understands where her students are coming from.

“As a child, I struggled with math, and someone helped me,” she said. “I want to do the same for my students.”

Phillips is a remedial intervention teacher at Lakeside Middle School, an inner-city, public middle school in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In addition to regular math classes, her students are enrolled in her class for supplemental help. They arrive in her classroom with a wide range of skills, from eighth

graders who are

one grade level down, to others learning at a third-grade level.

Most of the students in her classes have had a negative history with math, and part of Phillips’ philosophy is to make sure they know it’s not their fault.

“I tell them that they’re in my class to help build skills that they missed along the way through no fault of their own,” she said. “Maybe they were changing schools or were sick for a week. Maybe they’ve had a trauma at home. Or maybe they simply weren’t ready to learn a certain skill. I try to turn that around, from fear of math to confidence.”

Individualized instruction leads to progress

When her school piloted ALEKS last year, Phillips was enthusiastic. The first thing that impressed her was the individualized assessment. When students first log in to ALEKS, they take an initial assessment of about 25-30 questions. ALEKS uses artificial intelligence to choose each question for each individual

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student, based on the student’s responses to all previous questions. The results show what the students have mastered, what they don’t know yet, and the topics they are ready to learn next.

“There are a million pathways for a student to get to where he has to go,” she said. “That would be impossible for me to hit right on, but ALEKS determines what each kid is ready to learn next. Maybe they need more practice in whole numbers before they go to measurements, or better fraction knowledge before they move on to proportions.”

Most of the time, Phillips lets students choose their own paths based on their Ready to Learn Topics in ALEKS, but on occasion she will provide them with additional guidance. For example, she might direct a student toward a specific skill, such as fractions, if that is what is being taught in the student’s regular math class at the time. Or, if Phillips sees through the reports in the ALEKS Instructor Module that several students are struggling with the same concept, she will pull them aside as a group and teach that topic so they can move forward. It’s a flexible approach that helps all students gain confidence.

“Once they feel success, they’re more willing to tackle something else,” she said. “The topics they complete are filled in on a pie chart, which motivates them in different ways. Some like to fill out one color at a time, some go for the whole thing. But they can do it any way they want, and they like that they can choose.”

From struggle to mastery

Phillips also appreciates how ALEKS helps students master math topics. Periodic assessments review previously learned concepts as well as test readiness for new concepts. If a student forgets a concept he or she has already completed, ALEKS places it back into their pie for the student to re-learn. Repetition eventually leads to mastery.

She sees the smile when a student understands a concept, or has a taste of success; Phillips said it’s her favorite part of the job.

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“I’ve had a few students tell me that they can make calculations in their heads faster than their friends,” she said. “They also like it when they’ve learned something in ALEKS before they cover it in their regular math class. When their core teacher starts explaining a concept, they’re excited to realize they already know what the teacher is explaining.”

Overall, Phillips knows that ALEKS is a valuable tool for her students.

“Because it’s so individualized, students learn exactly what they need to, and it’s in a way that enables them to experience a lot of success,” she said. “I’ve seen my students grow both their math skills and their confidence.”